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ABSTRACT

Students enrolled in formal continuing education classes were studied to determine if their motivations were similar. Eighty-six percent of the students were enrolled in formal credit courses. Students were also compared to graduates who did not continue their education. Included in the analysis were college graduates (23-62 years old) from 46 schools who had a bachelors degree but had not yet completed an advanced degree. Those involved/not involved in formal continuing education were compared on the variables of age, sex, income, occupation, college major, years since graduation, learning ability, effect of education on quality of life, satisfaction with the challenge of work, satisfaction with job advancement potential, satisfaction with career potential, satisfaction with salary and benefits, and education and occupational congruency. Variables that were significantly associated with continued schooling were: age, income, years since graduation, college major, present occupation, and satisfaction with current salary and benefits. A high percentage of persons earning $9,000-$14,999 were among those continuing their education. Those over age 30 participated in continuing education more than did the 23-24 age group. Many of the results were consistent with findings of other similar studies. (SW)

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Factors Related to Educational Participation Among Adults

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 15-17, 1985. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

INTRODUCTION

Recently educators have become more interested in adult students. This trend may be due to several reasons including an increasingly complex work environment which demands continuing education as a means of updating current job skills, a concern about the potential for a decline in the number of traditional aged students entering our colleges and universities, a realization that learning can become an integral and interesting part of an adult's life, recent research that suggests adults have the ability to continue to learn throughout most of their lifetime, and because a number of theorists and researchers have made a convincing argument about the nature and importance of adult learners (Knox, 1977; Cross, 1978; Boshier, 1971; Anderson and Durkenwald, 1979; Johnstone and Rivera, 1963; Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974).

Students themselves are becoming more conscious of their potential to continue their learning as adults and they may return to school for a variety of reasons. These include a desire for professional growth, long range economic security, increased salary benefits, social status and prestige, family and peer opinions and expectations, and expectations of authority figures (Apps, 1980). Another item that could be added to this lists is the intrinsic reward associated with learning.

For the past two decades researchers have formally examined the reasons adults give for seeking additional education. In his seminal work The Inquiring Mind, Houle (1961) described three major groups of learning orientations. These three groups included: (1) goal oriented individuals - those using education to accomplish clearcut tasks; (2) activity oriented individuals - those taking part because they find fulfillment in the social aspects of the activity; and (3)

learning oriented individuals - those seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake. Studying adult students in New Zealand Boshier (1971) found four general themes including other-directed advancement, learning orientation to prepare for the future, self vs. other centeredness, and social contact. He noted that these categories were essentially consistent with Howles earlier defined categories. Examining St. Louis area adult learners, Burgess (1971) identified seven general reasons for adult educational participation: for knowledge, for personal goals, for social goals, for religious goals, for social activity, to escape routine activities, and to comply with formal requirements.

Morstain and Smart (1974) conducted research expanding on the work done by earlier theorists pursuing information on motivational orientations. Utilizing both demographic data and motivational information they were able to identify some interesting trends in respect to sex and age that had not before been discussed. Men appeared to be more concerned than women in becoming involved in education for reasons originating from external sources, and for reasons which dealt with compliance and formal requirements or recommendations. In respect to age, younger adults appeared to be more interested in educational activities for social relationships than were older participants. (Morstain and Smart, 1974).

Boshier attempted to examine psychological motivations as well as social and environmental ones. Drawing conclusions from his research and the work of others, he hypothesized that "it appears that motivational orientations are more than just superficial clusters of reasons for enrollment. They seem to be surface manifestations of psychological states which are in turn probably related to psycho-social conditions in various age and socioeconomic groups." (Boshier, 1977, p. 112)

Other researchers in the area of adult education took a slightly different perspective in looking at the reasons for educational participation by examining demographic characteristics. One of the earliest, and probably one of the most comprehensive major works of this nature was the one done by Johnstone and Rivera (1965). Their research sampled people from across the country with a variety of backgrounds. In summarizing the results of their research, Johnstone and Rivera, described the "typical" adult education participants. The participant was as likely a woman as a man, was normally under 40 years old, had completed at least a high school education, had an above average income, worked full-time and was more likely employed in a white collar occupation, was most often white and Protestant, was married and a parent, lived in an urban area, and would be found in all parts of the country (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965).

Knox and Videback posed several hypotheses about adult learners after examining demographic characteristics. To summarize the more relevant conclusions of their review of the research, they found that: participation in adult education increased during young adulthood and then declined shortly before middle age; the proportion of participants in the 60-69 age group was higher than any other group except those in the 25-29 category; there was no real difference between the participation rates of men and women; adult education participation was strongly linked to socioeconomic status; and that participation in adult education was related to differential life experiences, e.g., sex, SES, marital status, employment status, and family status (Knox and Videback, 1963).

Reviewing state and national studies on the needs and interests of adult students, Cross (1977) found results similar to many of the other researchers.

Cross found that when considered on a national basis women participated at about the same rates as men. Interestingly enough though, the results of most studies quite consistently reflected the traditional male and female stereotyped roles. Men were more interested in job-related education, whereas women were more interested in cultural enrichment, home and family education. In regard to age, she did not find the high proportion of participants in the older age group that other researchers had found. Interest, as well as participation appeared to decline in the age group of the 30's and dropped off dramatically after age 55.

More than any other single characteristic, education was most closely related to the interests, motivations, and participation rates of adult learners. From her review of the research, it seemed to be true that the more education people had, the more they were interested in receiving (Cross, 1977). This notion was also supported in the work done by Cross, Tough and Weathersby (1978) when they reveiwed social and educational factors affecting motivations for learning.

Miller (1980) studied statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics and found that there were over 10 million registrants in non-credit continuing education in the year ending in June of 1980. One finding was that the health professions and business/management fields were the two most popular areas among participants. Most non-credit continuing education activities were not frivolous, but were tied to very real occupational, family or other practical concerns of everyday life. The rate of growth in non-credit activities rose 80% from 1968-1978, and the number of colleges and universities offering these activities more than doubled (Miller, 1980). Glass and Hurshberger (1974) examined characteristics such as age, income, race, sex, and

part-time status. From these data they concluded that it seemed clear that education and age were the most significant factors in gaging participation. Education had a positive effect and age a negative one.

London (1970) studied the influence of social economic status on the participation rates in adult education. He concluded from his research that the level of formal education was the best single indicator of participation in adult education. Ruberson (1978) examined the factors that affect students deciding not to return to continue their education. He cited data suggesting that one of the most powerful psychological impediments is the feeling that participation in adult education will not improve the participants' living situations, or give them specific advantages in the labor market.

Summarizing the research that has been conducted over the past two decades shows that much work has been done utilizing demographic variables. Researchers have examined the nature of the adult learner focusing on items such as sex, age, income, occupation, years out of school, and previous educational levels, career goals, degree goals (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Knox and Videback, 1963; Carp, et al., 1974; Cross, 1977; Arbeiter, 1976, Moine, 1981). In general researchers have found that previous educational background is probably the single most important factor in determining educational participation. Those with more years of formal education were more likely to enroll than were students with less education.

Generally speaking those who participated in adult education courses were better educated, had higher incomes, were more often working in professional occupations, by and large 55 years of age or younger, as likely to be female as male, and often enrolled in school for a variety of reasons. Though men and

women participated at about the same rates, men were more likely to seek employment or externally related benefits as opposed to personal enrichment. In fact, Cross (1977) found that rarely were there any dramatic departures from traditional sex role conceptions in regard to educational participation.

Background and Rationale

Though much research has been conducted to determine why adults seek educational learning opportunities. Several other issues remain unaddressed. Most of the previous research has utilized subjects currently enrolled in some form of adult education and much of it has examined noncredit activities. This study was undertaken to investigate students enrolled in formal continuing education classes to see if their motivations were similar, i.e. eighty-six percent of the subjects were enrolled in formal credit courses. Furthermore, continuing education students were contrasted to those who had not sought additional work to serve as a comparison group.

Several other aspects were unique about the present research. Previous level of education has been found to be highly related to adults' decisions to seek education (Johnstone and Rivera, 1963; Cross, 1978; Anderson and Durkenwald, 1979). In the present research, to allow the examination of other relevant characteristics, subjects with a similar level of education were selected for the present study. Only students who had completed a bachelors degree, yet had not completed an advanced degree, were included as subjects. Additional controls were instituted controlling for sex, income, age, and years of absence from college in each comparison.

Due to the fact that two comparison groups were included in the analysis, this research allowed for a statistical test for similarity or relatedness, i.e., a chi-square statistic. Additionally, this study contrasted the two

groups on both demographic variables and attitudinal variables. This allowed an examination of both the personal learner characteristics and the attitudes of the learners.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects were drawn from 46 institutions of higher education across the United States who had surveyed their alumni using the Alumni Survey designed by the American College Testing Program (ACT). This survey instrument was used to examine the attitudes of the college alumni about their educational experience and their feelings about the personal benefits. The survey also included questions concerning their current occupational and educational experiences. During approximately a 15 month period of time a total of 13,889 surveys were collected. This represented a median response rate of approximately 50% of the total sent out. Preliminary analysis indicated that this group was representative of the colleges and universities utilizing the ACT research services.

In regard to the research conditions mentioned above students with advanced degrees and those not having completed a bachelors degree were excluded. Since the focus of the study was on adult students, those under the age of 23 years were also excluded. For the purpose of statistical validity, those over 62 years of age were also excluded since, i.e., only 77 subjects above 62 were present in the original group. This left a subgroup of 9,389 individuals who were included for further analysis.

Subjects were contrasted according to two categories: those who had sought formal continuing education since college graduation and those who had not. The two groups were compared according to the variables of age, sex, income, occupation, college major, years since college graduation, learning ability,

effect of education on quality of life, four job satisfaction measures, and education and occupational congruency. Analyses were conducted utilizing two-way and three-way crossbreak tables, chi-square statistics and frequency distribution tables. To determine the significance of any one cell, a cell chi-square statistic was also computed. The four control conditions mentioned above were used in examining each variables.

RESULTS

Most of the variables discussed in the following section are self explanatory, e.g., sex, income, and age. Questions measuring persons' attitudes utilized five response categories. For example, in respect to satisfaction with work, subjects were asked to respond to one of the following choices: very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. A table on page 12 summarizes the results.

1. Continuing education was statistically related to age. Fewer students than expected who had engaged in further schooling were among those aged 23-24 and more students than expected were among those aged 30 and above. This relationship held true even while controlling for salary and sex, but only for those graduating from college within the past three years.

2. Sex was not associated with continued schooling. Students who had returned to school were not more likely to be from one particular sex. It appears that men and women had returned to school in essentially the same proportions.

3. Income was statistically related to continuing education. Persons who had sought further formal education were more likely than expected to be earning from $9,000-$14,999 and less likely than predicted to be earning $21,000 or more per year. While using length of time from school as a control, this trend was

only true for those students graduating two years or more previously. A slight variation also occurred when using sex as a control in that the men who had taken additional formal education were also more likely than expected to be earning $0-$8,999. The trend for men was not true for women and in fact they were less likely to be in that group than expected if they had sought further education.

4. Additional formal education was statistically related to the length of time since previous college graduation. Generally speaking those who had returned to school were less likely than expected to be among those who had graduated in the past two years. On the other hand, among this group there were more persons than predicted among those who had graduated five years or more previously. This appeared to hold true when utilizing the control variables except for those earning over $21,000 and for those thirty years or older.

5. College major was statistically associated with continued schooling. Persons who sought further schooling were more likely than was predicted to have studied in the biological sciences, the physical sciences, or the education fields. Persons who had not continued their schooling were more likely than expected to have majored in business, communications, or a health field.

6. Present occupation was statistically associated with additional education. Persons who sought more education were more inclined than expected to be working in the educational fields. There were more subjects than predicted among those who had not returned to school who were working in business, communications, or the health fields.

7. Individual learning ability showed no relationship with returning to continue formal educational study. Though over one-half of the total group of subjects responded that they thought their abilities as individual learners had

been increased, this variable did not show a relationship to return to school.

8. The effect of previous college work on the quality of life was not related to the decision to return to school. The most likely reason for this result may be that roughly 93 percent of the respondents felt that the quality of their life had been improved regardless of any financial benefits. This generally indicated a widespread agreement that education improved the intangible aspects of their life and that those who did not identify this possible effect may have returned for other more applied reasons.

9. Satisfaction with the challenge of work was not related to continuing education. While the overall statistical test for the relationship was significant at the predetermined level, it did not hold true while controlling for salary or the number of years since graduation. No particular trend was consistent which suggested that a meaningful relationship existed. Most likely, the overall chi-square value was statistically significant only a product of the large number of subjects.

10. Satisfaction with job advancement potential was not related to a return to school. Whether or not the respondents were satisfied with the potential advancement nature of their current jobs had no statistical relationship to their continued schooling.

11. Satisfaction with the job career potential was not related to the act of returning to school. No variation occurred even though roughly 46 percent of the persons replied that they felt either neutral or dissatisfied with their current career potential in their jobs.

12. Satisfaction with current salary and benefits was statistically related to continued schooling. Subjects who had returned to school were less likely than anticipated to be very satisfied or satisfied with their current salaries

and more likely to be neutral or very dissatisfied with this aspect of their jobs. Through examination of the primary relationship using control variables it appears that this general trend is accurate for those persons who have graduated at least three years previously, are 25 years of age or older, and who earn between $15,000 and $20,999 annually though the variation is not very dramatic.

13. The subjects' responses to the congruence between their present occupations and their previous college majors was not related to their return to school. Although 32 percent of the subjects replied that there was only a slight relationship or no relationship between their work and their previous college study, this did not have any statistical relationship with further study.

TABLE 1

Summary of Comparison Statistics

Continuing Education Status contrasted to:

Variable	Chi-square	DF	Probability
Age	91.7	4	.0001*
Sex	.35	1	.5548
Salary	28.7	3	.0001*
Years since graduation	86.8	6	.0001*
College major	227.3	19	.0001*
Occupation	295.8	19	.0001*
Individual learning ability	3.1	2	.2103
Quality of life	10.3	4	.0358
Job congruency	2.8	3	.4287
Satisfaction with:			
challenge of work	13.5	4	.0090**
advancement potential	12.6	4	.0134
career potential	4.9	4	.3003
salary & benefits	32.9	4	.0001*

*statistically significant at .01 level

**did not retain statistical significance with control conditions

Discussion and Implications for Future Research

This research identified some of the characteristics which may distinguish those persons who have continued their schooling from those who have not sought schooling beyond a bachelors degree. One very interesting finding from this research was that the demographic variables were the ones that showed a relationship to continued schooling. Age, income, college, major, occupation, length of time since college graduation were all statistically related to further education. Only one of the attitudinal variables, satisfaction with salary and benefits, showed a statistical relationship with continuing education. The items measuring the six other variables were not statistically related to continuing education status. Consequently, it would seem that further schooling is more of a function of socioeconomic variables than of the certain attitudes measured, i.e., congruency between previous education and present job, job satisfaction with career and job advancement, satisfaction with challenge of work, feelings about the quality of life as a result of one's education, and feelings about one's ability to learn independently as a result of previous education.

The attitudinal variables that were utilized did not show much promise in differentiating between those persons who sought further education and those who did not. Only one variable out of seven showed a constant statistical relationship. Most earlier research has focused on personal learning motivation and has not attempted to explain educational participation in regard to attitudes about job satisfaction, quality of life, or individual learning ability.

This does present some unanswered questions. If, as the literature would indicate, persons appear to return for career related reasons, why do the

variables relating to job satisfaction not differentiate between those who sought more education and those who did not? One reason may be the complex nature of job satisfaction. Another may be that some people do not view education beyond the bachelor's degree as crucial in seeking career objectives.

Boshier (1977) and Berry (1971) discussed psychological motives as a primary source in the decision to participate in education. However, the current research did not lend any specific support to this hypothesis when considering three of the four job satisfaction variables or the variable measuring congruency between previous education and current job. Quite clearly job satisfaction is a very complicated construct and was not related in any simple manner to those persons who had sought further schooling. Furthermore, no clear cut relationship should necessarily exist. A person may decide to return to school to improve his or her career potential or may decide against pursuing education because of discontent with work. Another perhaps paradoxical situation may arise. A person may seek further education in a new area because the career potential is not satisfactory. Or one may seek educational experience because the career potential is very strong yet certain additional training is required. Whatever the case, persons who sought further schooling did not respond significantly different from those who did not on the variables measuring satisfaction with career potential, advancement potential, challenge of work, or in regard to job and previous educational consistency.

One of the most puzzling findings was that the variable measuring congruency between previous education and present occupation did not help identify those who sought additional schooling. While often cited as a reason for returning to school it may be erroneous to assume a direct relationship exists with educational participation. That is, in this study people who did

not feel their previous education was related to their current position were no more likely to seek additional schooling. It may be that they did not view additional schooling as a means of enhancing their career potential. Or, similar to the discussion about the job satisfaction variables, people may return for additional schooling quite regularly even if their careers and previous education are congruent. Nontheless, simply identifying a mismatch between persent career and previous education does not seem to help predict those who will return to school.

Another finding was that subjects who returned to school did not respond significantly different from those who did not, regarding independent learning ability as a result of college. Though this may seem somewhat inconsistent with the theory that education serves as a springboard for further education, it does seem to promote the idea that goal oriented or practical motives may be linked to further education. Moreover, formal schooling may be viewed as a very different learning format from the individual learning activities typically engaged in by adults.

It is worth mentioning that the variable measuring the satisfaction with salary and benefits did show a statistical relationship when comparing those who returned to school with those who did not. This was the only job satisfaction variable that showed any consistent results when utilizing the control variables. This variable was probably the most tangible measure, and may have been the least ambiguous to those subjects who responded. This result also lends some credence to the idea that subjects seem to return to school for very practical reasons.

By and large many of the results of this research were consistent with the findings identified in the current literature. As early as 1962 Houle noted

that there was a sharp increase in educational participation among those persons in their late 20's through around 50. His conclusion was consistent with the findings of this research which found more persons 30 years of age or above than anticipated among the group who had continued their formal education.

Houle also cited the importance of income as a component in determining participation. That is compatible with the findings of this research. Based on research he conducted in 1977, Boshier reports that educational participation was more predominant among the upper socioeconomic groups. Johnstone and Rivera (1965), Malin et al., (1980), and Arbeiter (1976) also reported a higher than average income among the adult education participants. While there were no results which directly contradicted this conclusion, this study did find a higher percentage of persons earning $9,000-$14,999 among those who had engaged in further schooling. In fact, there was a slightly lower percentage among those earning the highest income who went on to school. It may very well be that among all groups the highest socioeconomic groups were more likely to return to school. Nevertheless, among those who have attained a certain level of education, a higher income is not an indication of increased participation.

Consistent with the landmark study conducted by Johnstone and Rivera (1965), men and women did not appear to seek further education at different rates. Roughly 48% of each sex returned to school. It may be that the sexual barriers that exist for women in some situations do not deter women from participation in further schooling.

A number of theorists discuss the function of age as a factor in continuing education. Boshier (1977) even suggests that the psychological motives for participation may change as a function of age and the personal development needs that exist at various ages. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) found higher rates of

participation among older persons and among 25-29 year olds. Contrary to this, Cross (1977) cites a decrease in participation among those over 55, as did Arbeiter (1976) who found a decrease among those aged 55-65 years old.

In this research age was related to continuing education. In fact, when comparing those who sought further schooling with those who did not there was a lower percentage of those in the 23-24 year old group and a higher percentage among those 30 years of age or above. Obviously those who are older most likely have had a longer period in which to return. This could account for the variance. Most of the previous studies examined persons who were currently enrolled. This study considered persons to be continuing learners if they had ever formally returned to school. This could also possibly account for any conflicting results.

In 1980 Malin and his colleagues reported that most of the adult learners had been out of school three years or more prior to their returning. Consistent with that finding, this study indicates that those who had additional formal education were more likely than predicted to be among those who had been out of school at least two years. It is likely that as persons are out of school for a period of time they encounter new life situations which demand additional schooling. A large number of persons returned for career objectives. Certainly as new career possibilities present themselves, adults find education as one means of obtaining these career goals.

When examining either college major or the current occupation the variables were related to continuing education. Ruberson (1978) noted employment related reasons as a motive for further education, as did Anderson and Durkenwald (1979). Relatively compatible with these conclusions, this research did indicate that those who had sought further schooling were more likely than

expected to have studied or to be working in the education field, and less likely than expected to have studied or to be working in the business, health, or communication field. This would be compatible with the theory that persons seek further schooling primarily for career related reasons (Anderson and Durkenwald, 1979).

From the research conducted it would appear that the demographic variables were more likely to be associated with whether or not a person had returned to continue his or her education. Further examination of demographic variables may prove to discriminate more clearly those students who returned to school as opposed to those who sought no additional formal education.

Even though the attitudinal variables were less likely to discriminate among the different types of students, it seems likely that other measurements of attitudes may prove to be more useful. Perhaps attitudinal measurements such as those that would gauge one's beliefs about professional educational development, the intrinsic value of lifelong learning, how to improve one's professional career, and how to increase one's earning power, would provide a more reliable indicator of whether or not a student would return to school. Additional research should be undertaken to study why students seem to cite career objectives as motives for returning, yet several job satisfaction variables were not related to whether or not a student sought further education.

In the present research a number of factors were utilized to limit the scope of the study. Additional research might be conducted to examine the relationship among persons who were not considered here. For example, there is a need for more research examining the learning activities of persons who are not engaged in any formal learning program but who are in fact participating in lifelong learning activities. Persons who have completed graduate or

professional degrees should also be studied as well as those students who have a considerable amount of postsecondary education but have not completed a bachelor's degree. Additional research would also be useful in examining the relationships among persons living in various geographical areas, or among adult students of various ages.

Research also needs to be conducted to contrast the behavior of persons to see if it in fact relates to their stated attitudes. It would be useful to know for example if certain persons return to school because of their views about career advancement and what will effect advancement. Due to the apparently highly pragmatic basis for the return to formal school, additional research should be conducted to separate some of the more specific attitudes related to careers and continued school. Additional education is probably more highly valued in some work settings than in others and this needs to be further explored. It would seem very fruitful to conduct further research similar to this research where occupation is utilized as a control variable. Since many of the respondents cited a career or work-based reason, it would seem very productive to review the associations in respect to differences which might be accounted for by occupation.

In summary, though much research has been conducted about adult educational participation, it seems prudent to continue to explore these basic relationships between personal characteristics and continuing education. As society changes and as the technology of work affects the bulk of the population it is conceivable that these relationships will vary. Furthermore, educational administrators continually need to monitor the interest, needs and behavior of their clientele to provide educational activities which will be responsive to the needs of students as well as of society.

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